6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

In the previous chapter I have indicated that the position of headman is today a somewhat shadowy one, and that the headman emerges rather than succeeds by virtue of various grounds; the main ones being official recognition, some tie to the local chief, the presence of a core of one's kinsmen, a claim to be the first resident, and personality. During my stay Sapapula was as much a headman of Epalanga as anyone can reasonably be these days, yet his position had not always gone unchallenged.

In 1954 he had found himself in danger of being displaced by his matrilateral 'brother' Mwehombo. Both men, apparently, claimed that they had founded the village, both had substantial cores of kinsfolk in the village, and both possessed strong personalities. Sapapula by holding the ministerial title of Epalanga to Kafelo had had a stronger position in village affairs. This prop to his power was taken away when Kafelo was deposed from the chiefdom, and Luanga and Mwehombo purchased the title of Epalanga from Lusase.

In this partnership Mwehombo must have been the leading personality, Luanga being extremely amiable but not at all domineering or energetic. Mwehombo's idea was presumably to establish himself as recognized headman of Epalanga, and to obtain whatever advantages were to be gained from an association with Lusase. Luanga's aim, from what he told me, was to escape contract labour by having a position as a traditional headman and title-holder. Titles will still be sought after, although the substance of power has gone, so long as they can confer some prestige or protection from administrative labour demands. It was not customary for the role of Epalanga to be held by two people jointly.

Mwehombo died shortly after this. He had been baptized by the name of Simon when dying on January 13th 1955, when his social personality began its posthumous career. At the inquest, which was held according to the old Umbundu pattern in which the corpse suspended in a hammock from a pole held by two men was supposed to answer questions by the way it swung, it was found that Mwehombo had suffered the proverbial fate of the sorcerer in being killed by the spirit he had used to kill others.

The role of the questioner was taken by Paulo, sister's son to